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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 002240

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ENRG](#) [PL](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: PUTIN TO VISIT GDANSK TO MARK 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF  
WWII'S OUTBREAK

REF: A. MOSCOW 1397

[1](#)B. MOSCOW 1349

Classified By: Acting Political MC David Kostelancik for reasons 1.4 (b)  
) and (d).

Summary

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[1](#)1. (C) PM Putin will attend the commemoration of the outbreak of World War II in Gdansk, Poland on September 1. During a meeting with PM Tusk, the sides are expected to sign agreements on cultural exchanges, transit of the Kaliningrad Bay, and the transfer of Polish HEU to Russia for reprocessing. The MFA is concerned with how Poland will treat the role of the Soviet Union during commemoration events, with Polish diplomats quietly accusing the GOR of maximizing its leverage to ensure a smooth session. Recent Russian documentaries and history materials marking the August 23 anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact have not calmed anxieties. However, the GOR believes it holds all of the cards in the relationship and Poland must show restraint on contentious issues. End Summary.

Constructive Visit Planned

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[1](#)2. (C) PM Putin will travel to Gdansk, Poland August 31-September 1 to attend memorial events marking the Nazi invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. Putin likely makes this visit with some trepidation, as Russia and Poland do not share a common view of the events that led to the conflict and a misstatement by either side could put at risk improving ties (Ref A). While in Poland, Putin is expected to meet with Ukrainian PM Timoshenko and Bulgarian PM Borissov, and may meet with German Chancellor Merkel, although his full schedule has not yet been finalized.

[1](#)3. (C) According to the MFA's Polish desk, following the anniversary events, Putin, Energy Minister Shmatko, and Infrastructure Minister Levitin (co-chair of the Poland-Russia Commission on Economic Cooperation) will meet with their Polish counterparts to sign a three-year cultural exchange agreement, an agreement permitting Polish and third-party ships to transit the Kaliningrad Bay, and an agreement for the transfer of highly enriched uranium (HEU) from Polish research reactors to Russia for reprocessing (see septel). The MFA sees these agreements as concrete and welcomes progress in what has been a difficult relationship.

But History May Get In the Way

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[1](#)4. (C) The context of this meeting greatly troubles the MFA; in particular, the nature of the commemoration displays, through which the foreign delegates will walk, and any comments PM Tusk or President Kaczynski may make regarding the Katyn massacre. While suspicious of remarks from the Polish side, the MFA's Polish Desk assured us that Putin

intends to express regret and mourning for the victims.

¶5. (C) Polish diplomats here share the MFA's trepidation and have quietly accused the GOR of insisting the bilateral session follow the formal anniversary events as leverage to ensure Poland does not make anniversary too awkward for Putin. They also charge that the GOR postponed negotiations between Russia's Gazprom and Poland's PGNIG on a new gas delivery contract to September 8-9, as a means to maximize pressure. Should Putin judge Tusk's or Kaczynski's remarks as too pointed, Polish diplomats now fear that Russia will walk away from bilateral talks and make gas negotiations difficult. This fear is not unfounded, as a German diplomat was told by MFA Deputy Director Polikov that Putin would be "ready to respond to any provocation."

¶6. (SBU) The GOR's recent steps at revising official histories of the outbreak of World War II has done little to calm anxieties (Ref B). On the seventieth anniversary of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact August 23, the MFA's official historian Konstantin Provalov justified the need for the Soviet Union to sign the agreement to buy time and pointed to the "Munich Compromise" as the real cause for the outbreak of the war. This version comes on top of a new documentary run on state television making a similar charge and warning against viewing events outside their historical context. An additional documentary to be run on government-owned NTV in the coming days is rumored to blame Poland's "plotting" with Germany as the real cause of the war, an assessment that reportedly coincides with an official SVR history that will be published on August 31, "Secrets of Polish Policy, 1933-1944," based on KGB archive material.

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Comment

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¶7. (C) Commemoration events will be a severe test of Polish and Russian commitments to a renewed and positive relationship. If commitments are insufficient, Russia is confident that it holds most of the cards in the bilateral relationship and that Poland will be compelled to show some modesty in how it handles the anniversary. At risk for Russia is its warming relationship with Poland, for which analysts credit PM Tusk's tone, and removing Poland as an opponent in European fora; however, it is questionable whether these would be sufficient to curb Putin's response to any perceived slights. Tension over history is one of the reasons why Russia and Poland formed the Commission on Difficult Matters in order to separate arguments of historical interpretation from high-level pragmatic discussions. The commemoration reverses this tactic, with neither Russian nor Polish diplomats certain whether the issues have indeed been separated.  
Beyrle